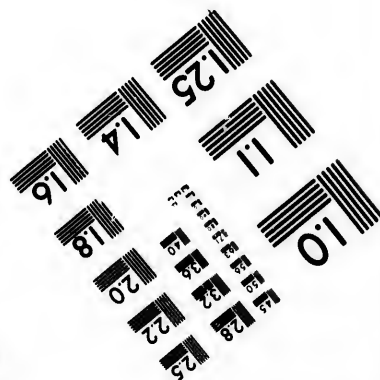
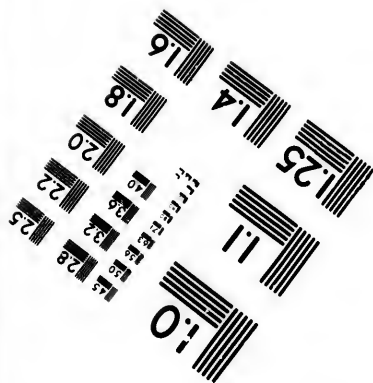
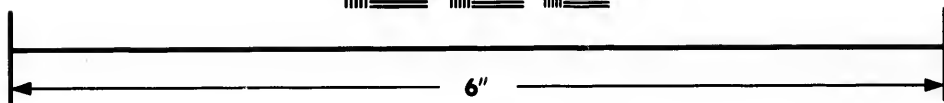
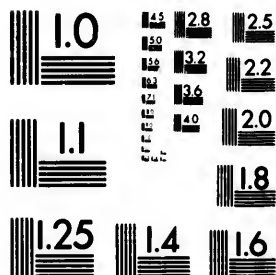


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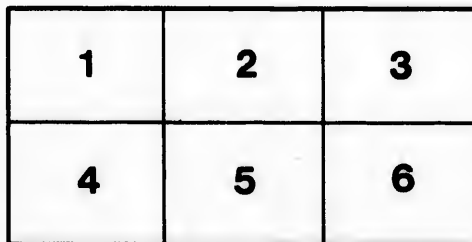
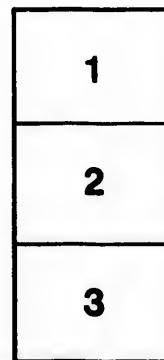
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THE  
MAHĀBHĀRATA



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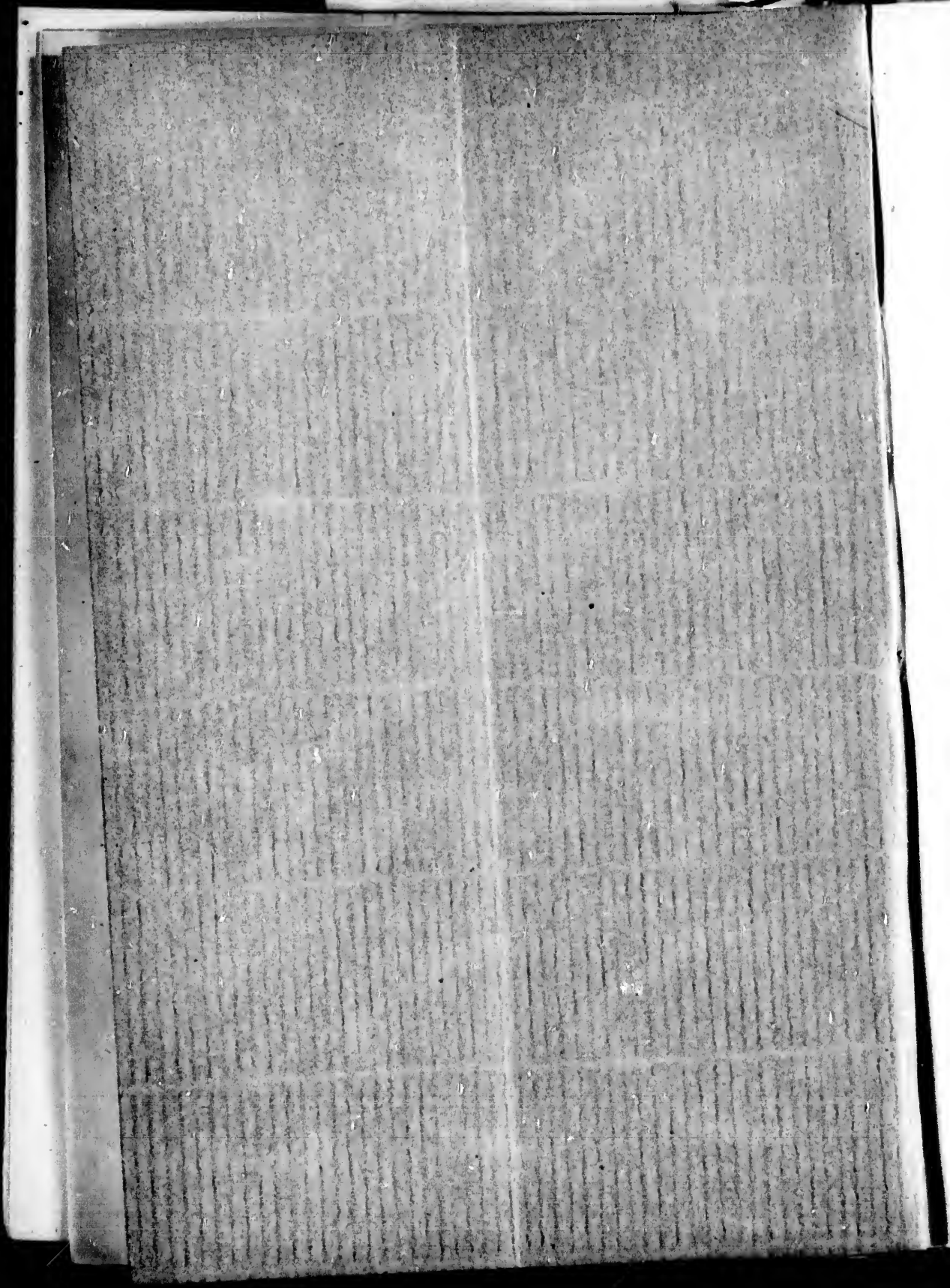
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## THE MAHABHARATA.

The Mahabharata is the great epic poem of the Hindus. Its main story narrates in detail a long feud, culminating in a great battle, between two closely related families of a race in India, who feigning, through the mists of tradition, to trace their pedigree to the moon, are called the Lunar race. The strictly epic portion forms, however, but a small part of the whole poem, as the bulk is made up of Brahmanic legends, disquisitions on Hindu philosophy, and numerous episodes, many of which, though of great beauty and tenderness, yet so widely diverge from the chief story, that they make its leading incidents difficult to trace in sequence.

Bharata is the name of one of the patriarchal heroes of the Lunar dynasty. He was a remote ancestor of the chief heroes of the poem, and of great celebrity, as, after him, the natives still call India, *Bharata-varsha*—the domain of Bharata. This poem celebrating the deeds of the descendants of this ancient prince, from its length, might be justly called the *maha* or great Bharata, as it contains 220,000 sixteen syllable lines, besides a supplement, the *Harivansa*, of 16,374 couplets, chiefly occupied with the race and adventures of Krishna. In importance its contents are also claimed to be in keeping with its length. In the beginning of the poem we are told that in a celestial balance prepared by the gods, when the Vedas were placed on one scale, and this poem on the other, it outweighed the four Vedas and their mysteries, and from that time on has been called the Mahabharata. But the derivation of the name of the poem from *bhara* weight, load, is thought by some to be only an instance of that play upon words of which Indian writers are so fond.

If these pretensions seem too exalted, it may be well to bear in mind that they scarcely exceed the esteem in which the poem is actually held. As Edwin Arnold pointedly says, "the value ascribed in Hindustan to this poem transcends all literary standards established in the west." Its religious importance is paramount, and its influence is intimately interwoven with the whole intellectual and social life of the Hindus. Indian poets and artists find in it innum-



erable sources of inspiration, and never tire in portraying its characters and incidents. Even its names of personages and places continue to this day names of endearment, and are repeated in all directions, to an almost indefinite length.

Protap Chandra Roy, who is doing so much to extend the interest due to ancient Hindu poetry, in a letter last year to Professor Lanman, graphically described the manner in which the Hindus still study their great epic. He says:—"Whenever the Bharata is read, it is read to a group of hearers. The professional reciters, who are Brahmins, read the poem to larger audiences. They who read are called *pathakas*. Side by side with them sit the *dharakas*—supporters—whose business it is to correct the *pathakas*. Generally it takes about three months to complete the recitation of the entire Bharata, which, leaving out the Harivansa, is at the rate of about a thousand couplets a day. Both readers and supporters are handsomely paid by those in whose houses the recitations are given. Throughout the entire period Brahmins are sumptuously fed every day, and are rewarded with *daksina*, which varies from a four anna bit to a rupee—about twelve to fifty cents. At the conclusion of the reading, a large number of persons, chiefly Brahmins, are fed, and large gifts are made to them. There is another class of men, called *kathakas*, who sing the Bharata, draw 'bumper' audiences and receive large remuneration."

Several editions of the original text of the Mahabharata have been published. The first entire printed edition is that commenced by the Committee of Public instruction, and completed, nearly fifty years ago, by the Asiatic Society of Bengal. Another edition held in high esteem was edited by the Pandit Tarakanath, and printed in Bengali character, somewhat more than twenty years since, at the expense of the Maharaja of Burdwan. For that edition eighteen manuscripts were collated by the editors. Of about the same date is the edition printed at Bombay, and more recently, within a few years, a society established by Mr. Protap Chandra Roy, of Calcutta, has circulated, at a nominal price, four editions of the Mahabharata, in Sanskrit Text, and Bengali translation.

The poem has been more or less completely translated into most of the vernacular languages of India, and Akbar, the Mogul Emperor, as far back as the sixteenth century, under the care of the brother of his great minister, Abulfazel, had some of its books trans-

lated into Persian. Wilkins, the English pioneer in many fields of ancient Indian literature, now more than a hundred years since, translated into English two episodes of the poem—the Bhagavat Gita, and that of the churning of the ocean to procure the *amrita*—the nectar of the Gods. Wilkins was then a servant of the East India Company, and Warren Hastings, first Governor General of India, sought to have Wilkins' translation published by the directors of the company. In the letter on that subject to his president, Hastings wrote with genuine enthusiasm of the value to the company of such work as Wilkins had done. The true knowledge of Hindu character, he urged, would lighten the chain of the conquered and imprint benevolence on the hearts of the conquerors. That knowledge, he averred, could be learned only from their writings, and these, he adds, "will survive when the British dominion in India shall have long ceased to exist, and when the sources it once yielded of wealth and power are lost to remembrance." Hastings knew the unsentimental character of his directors. Once when he sent them some Indian antique coins of rare value, his rarities were transferred to the melting pot, and transformed into serviceable guineas. But his request in the case of Wilkins' translation was one which concerned only native opinion, not guineas. John Company had never been intolerant of native opinions. Col. Dow, on the state of Bengal in 1770, reports, "he that will consent to part with his property, may carry his opinions away with freedom." So the eloquence of Hastings was successful. The court of directors had the translation published under their authority, and in their advertisement declare it is "one of the greatest curiosities ever presented to the literary world."

The literary mine discovered by Wilkins was not neglected. Wilson, Muir, Dean Milman, Edwin Arnold, and others, explored its treasures, and have kept on bringing to the light, for English readers, new specimens of its riches; while in Germany and France, Bopp and Lassen, Focaux and Fauche, have rendered like services for their countrymen. In 1847, Brockhaus, the famous Leipzig publisher, proposed the issue by subscription of a critical complete translation of the whole poem. The translator was to be the late Professor Goldstucker, yet notwithstanding his recognized admirable qualifications for the proposed task, but a few subscribers responded to the prospectus issued, and the work was dropped. Fauche, in

France, also started to translate the whole poem, and at the time of his death, fifteen years ago, had accomplished about half his work.

To this day no western language suffices to unlock all the pages of this great poem. But in 1882 a plan was devised to translate the whole Mahabharata into English prose, and it was from India, and from a Hindu gentleman that the suggestion came. Mr. Protap Chandra Roy of Calcutta proposed to issue an edition of 1,250 copies of the Mahabharata in an English version, and further, to circulate it amongst Anglo-Indian, English and American readers taking an interest in Indian literature, free, or at least at a nominal price. He felt himself impelled to this, by the profound conviction that this additional knowledge of the splendid inheritance of his countrymen in their ancient literature, might prove no unworthy contribution to modern philological and kindred learning. Moreover, as an inscrutable providence had linked the destiny of his country with that of an island in the west having the splendid present and glorious future of England, he believed it must be a common service for both England and India, to present Englishmen with such an illustration of what had been the glory of India in the remote past.

Thirty-four fasciculi, more than 2,000 pages, a third of the work, are already issued at a cost—including honorarium to translators, outlay for postal transmission to members, and all other expenses added to that of printing—amounting to over \$600.00 for each fasciculus. The *datarya bharata karyalaya*, the society organized by Mr. Roy for the gratuitous distribution of the Mahabharata has borne this expense, and has derived its funds to do so from the native princes and chiefs of India, who contributed more than half the amount; from the Local Governments of India, who gave nearly a third of the outlay; and the balance from single subscriptions. Applications to Mr. Roy are more numerous than his first edition of 1,250 can meet, and he has already commenced to print a second edition of the early parts, to supply the increasing demand.

The age of the Mahabharata is uncertain, as India has few chronological landmarks to be trusted. Careful investigation has made it tolerably certain that the Indian prince Chandragupta is the Sandrocottus of the Greeks, the prince who came to the camp of Alexander the Great, when that conqueror invaded India. This is a slender thread for historical dates to hang on, but without it the time when Buddha lived, and when Asoka made Buddhism the

religion of his state—events often referred to, and of great importance in Indian chronology— would be even more uncertain than they now are. Asoka, it must be borne in mind, was the grandson of Chandragupta, the second successor to his throne, and the prince who erected the pillars throughout India, inscribed with Buddhistic edicts. Dr. Rajendralala Mitra, lately president of the Asiatic Society of Bengal, a most learned Hindu, says :—“ The Mahabharata “ is admitted on almost all hands to have existed long before the “ reign of Asoka, very likely from before the date of Buddha himself.” That is—following the clue given by our knowledge of the time of the Greek invasion of India—at least 350 years B. C., and probably several centuries earlier. Edwin Arnold, in the preface to his *Idylls*, translated from the Mahabharata, says the simpler and nobler parts of the poem were “ anterior to Homer, perhaps even to “ Moses.”

The author of the Mahabharata was the sage Krishna Dwipayana Vyasa. His pupil, Sauti, opens the poem in true Indian style by narrating to the recluses in the forest of Naimisha that when Vyasa had formed the poem in his imagination, Ganesa, whom all Indian authors respectfully salute in the first sentence of their books, the divinity whose special province it is to crown honest exertion with success, himself consented to write at the poet's dictation. To some this may give only such satisfaction as the poet Heine took from his thorough knowledge of the entire list of the kings of regal Rome, namely, an enhanced appreciation of the criticism which showed they never existed at all ; for Lassen, with his unrivalled knowledge of Indian antiquity, is on hand to coolly assure us that Vyasa, meaning the arranger, is to the Mahabharata what he is to the Vedas, “ *der personificirten Diaskeuase* ”—merely the personified arranger and corrector—not the author of the poem at all. The believer in Vyasa may perhaps take comfort in remembering that the Indian poem is not the only epic whose author critics have done to death. Nitzsch regretfully says, “ We Germans have so blotted the “ image of Homer that scarcely a shadow of his personality remains.” And even Grote, the English man of affairs, as well as scholar, whose brain we have a right to expect free from cobwebs, says :—“ Homer “ is no individual man, but the divine or heroic father of the gentle “ Homerids.” On the other hand Professor Blackie kindly tells us to bear in mind that as all good work presupposes a good workman,

so all good poetry postulates the existence of a good poet, and it is refreshing to hear his assertion of belief in the flesh and blood personality of Homer, which he can no more doubt than he doubts that of Julius Caesar or Robert Burns. Whether the doughty professor of the north would fight as truculently to establish the personality of Vyasa as he has done for his favorite Homer may be very doubtful; and the truth may perchance lie hidden somewhere midway between the theory of Lassen and the belief of the altogether uncritical. Indeed, in all old epic poetry the imaginative and the real, fact and fiction, shade into each other as delicately and undistinguishably as do the colors of the rainbow, an average acumen readily enough marks the broader distinctions in both, but in their finer gradations the acutest perception is at fault in discerning where one ends and the other begins.

Although the Mahabharata is a poem of such inordinate length, its main story might be told in a few words. Passing by the more mythical characters of the first book, we find the Bharata already referred to, on the throne of Hastinapura, about sixty miles east of modern Delhi. He was son of the graceful Sakuntala, the favorite story of whose life is told in the first book of the poem, and which in its main outlines is the same as given in the drama of Kalidasa, the later poet, who drew from it his inspiration. It was the translation of Kalidasa's Sakuntala, by Sir William Jones, which caused the first flutter of excitement in Europe over Indian poetry.

Even in the time of Bharata we find the golden age was in the past, for our poet sings it was in a still earlier reign, when all were virtuous from virtuous motives, and there was no fear of thieves, or famine, or disease. Passing over several descendants of Bharata, who in succession sat on his throne, we come to the time when Pandu, son of Kuru, reigned in great splendor. He subjugated robber tribes, made kings pay him tribute, and aspired, we are told, to be conqueror of the world. At length, sated with conquests, he resigned his throne to Dhritarashtra, his elder brother, who was blind. The two wives of Pandu, the abdicated king, had five sons, who were brought up at their uncle's court, and trained by Drona, a great sage and warrior, with their cousins, the hundred sons of the king, given to him in a miraculous way.

The sons of Pandu are called, in the poem, after their father, the Pandavas, and those of the king after their remoter ancestor,

Kuru, the Kauravas, and it is the feud between these families and their retainers which furnishes the epic portion of the Mahabharata. Of the five Pandu sons, the third, Arjuna (*splendid*), is the hero of the poem. In his character are combined intelligence, humility, valor, modesty, gigantic strength and womanly tenderness; he is, in fact, after the ideal of the times, a paragon of the warrior—kingly, the *Kshatriya* class. Yudhishtira (*firm in battle*), the eldest, is rightly, however, the favorite with the Hindus. He experiences joy and sorrow with the same dignified equanimity, and is a perfect model of justice, valor, honor and self-abnegation. Bhima (*terrible*), the second son, was of immense stature and strength, and though wrathful and impetuous, was good at heart and devoted to his kinsfolk. The twin younger sons, Nakula and Sahadeva, were high spirited and worthy. The king's sons are in character the reverse of their cousins, and serve as foils for the poet to make the Pandavas more resplendent.

Continuous petty strifes sprang up between the cousins, but the grand contention was, who should stand first in succession to the throne. On account of his blindness, Dhritarashtra the king, required a *yuvaraja*, a prince regent, to aid in his kingly offices, and Yudhishtira, though only the son of the king's younger brother Pandu, being born before the king's own eldest son Duryodhana (*difficult to fight with*) was by custom the heir apparent, and, therefore, entitled to act as *yuvaraja*. Yudhishtira was installed as prince regent by the king. But the discontent of his eldest son increased. With honey on his tongue but poison in his heart, he treacherously tried first to poison, then to drown Bhima, but his wickedness was miraculously frustrated, though he at length succeeded in getting the king, his father, to send all the Puru princes into exile to Varanavata (*Allahabad*.) Prior to their exile there, the wicked Duryodhana had a palace built in advance for them, their mother and their friends, but had it secretly filled between the walls with inflammable resins, intending to burn them in their sleep. The Pandavas, learning this wicked design, frustrated it by mining secretly an underground passage to escape by, setting fire to the palace themselves, when the agent left to destroy them was asleep, and fleeing for their lives. The Kauravas for some time thought their rivals were destroyed, while they were living at a place called Eka-chakra with a Brahmin, where they slew monsters and protected the helpless in true mytho-heroic fashion.

The Pandavas at the suggestion of their mother, and with advice of Vyasa, left their retirement, going to the kingdom of the Panchalas, north and west of Delhi, where the *swayamvara* of Draupadi, the daughter of that king, was to be held. The *swayamvara* or self choice of a husband, is not uncommon with the Hindus, and their poets vie with each other in picturing the ceremony. The account of the *swayamvara* of Draupadi in the Mahabharata, is a series of exquisite word pictures. A vast amphitheatre, shaded with a canopy of many colors, was erected on a plain, northeastwards of the capital of the Panchalas, and there the candidates for the maiden's hand, and hosts of spectators gathered. For the invited suitors, mansions seven stories high, each with an hundred doors, and stairways of snowy marble, garlanded with flowers and fragrant with aloes, surrounded the amphitheatre. Around these again was a moat, and a wall with high arches at intervals. The windows of each mansion were fretted with gold, and the walls sparkled with precious stones. Visitors were received with the blare of a thousand trumpets, and actors and dancers amused the assembly for sixteen days in succession. An elevated platform ran around the amphitheatre for the spectators. Usually the candidates at a *swayamvara* occupy elevated seats or *manchas* in the area, each *Mancha* being separate from the rest and provided with steps for ascent and descent. The maiden who makes her choice, attended with a bevy of fair girls carrying a garland, and accompanied by her brother or some bard, passes from *Mancha* to *Mancha*. Before each candidate the brother announces the distinctions that are his due, and the maiden finally places the coveted garland on the hero of her choice. At the *swayamvara* of Draupadi on the sixteenth day of the feast, her brother, taking her arm, led her to the middle of the amphitheatre, and producing a bow of immense strength, with five sharp arrows, announced that he of the candidates who could string that bow, and hit the target there before them in a certain prescribed manner, if of acceptable lineage and person, should have his sister Draupadi to wife. Numerous suitors tried in vain to bend that bow. The poet fairly revels in describing them and their adornments of crowns, garlands, ornaments and mighty arms. So far none but Karna of the Suta tribe could string the bow, and Draupadi at once declared she would not take a Suta for her lord. What all failed to do, at last Arjuna did. In the twinkling of an eye he strung the bow and sped an arrow to

the mark. The unsuccessful suitors sent up one wail of despair, while flowers for the victor were showered down into the arena, which rang with exultant shouts. Then bards, to joyous music, chanted in sweet tones, the hero's praise. Krishna himself, to whom the hero was akin, approached him with a white robe and floral wreath, and Arjuna left the lists followed by her who thus became his wife.

A polyandrous marriage—or series of marriages—was celebrated between Draupadi and all the five Pandu brothers. The consent of their mother to this union was readily obtained. There is evidence to think she suggested that form of marriage to her sons, as there is to show that it took considerable casuistry to secure for it the consent of the bride's father. Polyandrous marriages, though opposed to Brahmanic laws, likely obtained in India ages ago. Yudhishtira refers to the custom as the way trodden by their fathers, and the usages of a few puny low tribes in India still, as of the Todas in the Niligiri hills, show the traces of their footsteps are not even yet altogether obliterated. In Britain such marriages are said to have been in vogue at the time of Cæsar's first invasion. Vyasa tells that miracles were not lacking to make the union a happy one, and a *modus vivendi* was agreed on to prevent family jars.

Dhritarashtra knowing how much the strength of the Pandavas was increased by this marriage alliance with the Panchalas, sent bridal gifts to Draupadi, and an invitation to the brothers to return to his capital. Their return and entry in state to Hastinapura is duly chronicled. At court, the king, to make peace with the cousins, solemnly gave over half his kingdom to the Pandavas; and with Yudhishtira as king, they settled in Khandava-prastha. Near the site of modern Delhi they built their capital. From its marvellous splendor and importance, the city they built was likened to the abode of Indra, the city of the gods, and was for that reason called Indra-prastha. In the outskirts of Delhi, near the great tower called the Kutub Minar, fragmentary ruins of Yudhishtira's city remain to this day.

By entering the chamber of the king at a forbidden time, Arjuna broke the compact made between the brothers at their marriage, and in atonement went into exile, for twelve years, in the forest. He trespassed the forbidden precincts in order to obtain arms for the chastisement of robbers, who had stolen a Brahman's kine, and though the king condoned the offence and wished his



illustrious brother to forego the penance, Arjuna persisted in carrying out the provisions of the fraternal compact at their marriage. Vyasa relates at length the numerous and strange adventures of Arjuna's exile, and his ceremonious reception at Indraprastha on his return. The streets were decked with flowers, and sprinkled with sandal wood water, at once fragrant and cooling, and were filled with a joyous throng of citizens, merchants and traders. One fly, indeed, there was in the ointment, one incident marred the happiness of the hero's return. With the consent of Yudhishthira, and following the customs of his time, Arjuna, in exile, had married Sabhadra of the Satwata race, a maiden of rare beauty, and when he presented himself to Draupadi, she said, "Why tarriest thou here, go where the daughter of the Satwata race is, a second tie upon a bundle relaxeth the first." But the second wife proffered to become the handmaid of the first, and Arjuna at length obtained forgiveness. The whole family became happy. Draupadi had five sons, heroes, steadfast in battle like the hills.

Meanwhile, Yudhishthira's subjects grew prosperous and contented, and adjacent kingdoms fell under his sway. His actions were kingly, and it is moreover said that he had great intelligence, and spake nothing that was improper, untrue, or disagreeable. As in some more modern instances, it is to be feared that occasionally at his court license followed on the heels of luxury, for the poet, describing a regal picnic on the banks of the Yamuna (*jumna*), says that feasting ran riot, so that even amongst the women of the party some had a gait unsteady with wine, and danced and sang, and laughed and jested, and some even obstructed each others progress, and fought with each other.

The Kingdom of Yudhishthira continued to prosper, the people, from Brahmin to Sudra, being more attached to the king than to their own relatives. In the capital, a *sabha* or audience chamber was built, which was the finest work of art in the kingdom. Soon after the new *sabha* chamber was built, the king's councillors urged him to perform the ceremony of the *Rajasuya*. That could be performed only by a king desiring the attributes of emperor, and when the monarchs attending the ceremony, acknowledged the sovereignty of the institutor of the sacrifice. As a preliminary step, the king sent out his four brothers, with four armies, in all directions. They conquered numerous kings, and returned to Indraprastha with droves of

camels laden with spoils. The poet takes evident pleasure in describing the preparations of the Pandavas for the celebration of this ceremony in honor of their king. Buildings with beautiful awnings were erected for the guests. None of the accessories for making a great feast complete were lacking. Thousands of Brahmins were in attendance, and—a curious feature of the morality of the times—many damsels were allotted to each Brahmin. As to tribute from the kingly guests, the poet fairly lets his imagination run riot in describing the elephants, horses, gold, weapons, precious stones, serving-men and serving-women, brought as offerings. But there is evidently much to be lopped off by the critical pruning hook if we wish to get rid of all that is imaginary, as amongst other fictions, the poet avers that the fame of the ceremony had spread to races of men born so far distant that they were of abnormal structure, many having but one leg and three eyes.

When at length these tributary kings had presented their offerings, and the last day of the sacrifice, when the king should be sprinkled with sacred water had come, Bhishma suggested that *Arghya* respectful offering, should be made to the kingly guests, according to custom. *Arghya* was a respectful token of social distinction, and might be merely the presentation of flowers, durva grass, or a few grains of rice; but the noblest guest must be proffered the first offering, and so on in succession to all the guests, according to rank. Bhishma, in reply to the king's enquiry as to who stood first in rank, gave Krishna as the foremost guest, and *Arghya* was first presented to him. The humbled pride of some in that ancient assembly of kings was angered to be outranked, as that of less distinguished guests has been from like cause in many an assembly since. The anger of Yudhishtira's guests became maddened beyond control, and culminated when the king of Chedi challenged Arjuna to combat, and was slain by Arjuna's discus.

At length the *Rajasuya* rites were finished, and the attendant kings escorted to the limits of Yudhishtira's kingdom on their return home. The great king had pledged himself to a policy of peace and justice towards all his subjects, but there were breakers ahead. The ceremony had conferred on the king the flattering insignia of imperial authority, but had inflamed afresh the jealousy of his cousins, and had on all sides quickened envy which menaces the great in proportion to their exaltation. After his return from the ceremony to Has-

tinapura, the eldest of the Kaurava princes, Duryodhana felt his heart burn as if on fire, with envy against the Pandavas, but knowing he and his brothers could not match them in fight, he agreed to the contemptable scheme of his uncle Shakuni, to lure Yudhishtira to destruction by gambling. Preparations were made on a sumptuous scale to entertain Yudhishtira at Hastinapura, where he was invited to be present at the opening of a new assembly house, and to engage in a friendly match at dice. The king was fond of dice, though he did not desire to play on that occasion. But the code of honor of the times made it unkingly to decline a challenge either to fight or play, and the king was at length taunted into a contest with Shakuni, a most skillful player, albeit of dubious reputation for fairness at dice. The poem shows with realistic force how the game was played, and how the king step by step staked and lost, jewels, gold, chariots, retainers, elephants, horses, all his possessions, even to the disposal of the persons of his brothers and of himself: and as a final stake the lovely Draupadi his wife. In the gambling madness that possessed him all was lost, his kingdom and himself. But Dhitarashtra the old blind king, fearing what might result from the new turn taken by the envy of his eldest son towards the Pandavas, and wishing to make peace between the cousins, annulled the results of the gambling, and allowed Yudhishtira to return home master of all he had before the gambling took place. Shakuni challenged the king, however, to a final stake which was to be exile into the woods for the family of the defeated, for twelve years, the thirteenth year to be passed unrecognized in some inhabited place. Yudhishtira accepted the challenge, played, and lost; and the Pandavas went into exile in the forest, jeered at and ridiculed by their cousins.

The *vana parva*, or forest book, one of the longest in the poem, details at great length the adventures of the Pandavas in the forest; and to prevent his song from becoming monotonous, the poet enlivens it with digressions of the most diverse kind. We are favored with a glowing picture of Arjuna's visit to Indra's heaven, and a long account of the *tirthas* or sacred springs and streams of Hindustan, to which the devout make pilgrimage. To console Yudhishtira, a sage tells him the story of Nala and Damayanti, a royal pair more wretched than himself and Draupadi, and from the same cause, gaming. This Nala episode is one of the best known parts of the Mahabharata, to readers outside of India. This book also contains other

idyllic stories such as, the temptation of Rishyasringa ; the Pandu brothers at the enchanted lake ; and how Savitri, by her importunity, won back her departed lord from Yama, who, with his dread noose, leads mortals to the regions of the dead. These idylls it would be difficult to equal, and they are accessible to all, as Edwin Arnold has translated them into inimitable English verse. In another digression, the poet gives us the Hindu version of the deluge, which in some points resembles, but in more differs from that given in our own Scriptures.

One condition of the exile of the Pandavas was : if the spies of their cousins found out their place of concealment in the thirteenth—the last year of their exile, their banishment must be another twelve years, but if they maintained a strict incognito, their kingdom would be restored. Twelve years having been spent by the Pandus in the forest, the brothers after long counsel, resolved to pass, if possible, their year of concealment at the court of Virata, king of the Matsyas, whose domain bordered on that of the Kurus. Having resolved on this, they left the mountain forests, and journeyed to the Matsya country. On nearing Virata's capital they hid their arms in a tree in the outskirts of the city, and one by one engaged to serve in Virata's household. To make their disguise as complete as possible, Arjuna became story teller to the court, and teacher of dancing, singing and music to the king's daughter. Yudhishtira obtained a position as courtier, being chief gamester, almsgiver and companion of the king. Bhima was cook. One of the twins became chief horse keeper, the other chief cowherd, and Draupadi was ladies' maid and *coiffeuse* to the queen. In these disguises, till their year of exile was up, they lived at Virata's court securely hidden from the spies of the Kauravas. Each skillfully played the role he had undertaken, though Bhima, at a festival held after they had lived three months with the Matsyas, made an indiscreet display of his strength by killing a wrestler at a joust, and six months later on, pummelled to death Kichaka, brother-in-law of the king and commander of his forces, because that rouse warrior had insulted Draupadi. The Kauravas thinking that the death of Kichaka would paralyse Virata's army, formed an alliance with a neighboring king, and made raids into the kingdom of Matsya, driving off thousands of cattle. In pursuing the raiders, Virata was wounded and taken prisoner, but the Puru princes rescued him and defeated his enemies. A simultaneous attack was

also made on another part of the kingdom by troops led by Duryodhana, and was successfully repulsed by Uttara, the king's son, with Arjuna and a few servants, owing to the miraculous power of the divinely bestowed arms of Arjuna.

Thirteen years, the whole term of the penalty incurred by Yudhishtira in his last eventful throw of the dice with Shakuni, were now passed. The Kauravas, by the terms of the game, were bound to restore to him his kingdom, and Bhishma, one of the oldest and best members of their family, urged them to do so without delay. This Duryodhana refused to do, and made ready to fight, as he suspected the Pandavas would do battle for the domain justly their own. What the Kauravas thought likely to happen soon came to pass, for the Pandus on their part, fearing the course their cousins would take, lost no time in forming alliances for forcibly asserting their rights to their former kingdom. Krishna rendered them valuable service in securing allies. The son of Arjuna was married to the daughter of Virata, and some of the most powerful kings of Northern India were present at the ceremony. Before they left the feast, Krishna took the opportunity to propose that an ambassador representing that assembly of kings, should be sent to the Kauravas, asking that Yudhishtira's kingdom be restored to him. The proposal of Krishna was agreed to, and the king of the Panchalas sent his own priest as ambassador. The king of the Panchalas foresaw that war was inevitable; Duryodhana, he said, would never render back the disputed kingdom peacefully, and the blind king, though dreading war, doated on his son and would be led by him, as would his ministers, some from imbecility, others from folly. What the shrewd king predicted came to pass. The embassy of the priest was fruitless, as was that of a return embassy sent by the old king of the Kurus who dreaded a fratricidal war. Krishna himself went to Hastinapura to see if means could not be found to avert war, but all was of no avail, and soon the cry on both sides was, onwards to the plain of Kuruskshetra, a spot that has been called the Waterloo of India.

We are given to understand that the battle was arranged to be fought after the strictest rules of honorable warfare then in vogue. None was to be slain who threw down his arms or ran; none must take arms against an antagonist without warning; and if two warriors were fighting, no third man could interfere. Foot soldiers, horse-

men, warriors in chariots and on elephants, could only fight soldiers similarly equipped to themselves. Bhishma, one of the oldest of their heroes, was made commander of the Kauravas, and Bhima had like honor with the Pandavas. As the forces neared each other, Duryodhana pointed out to Drona the chiefs on both sides, naming them one by one; a formidable list. Suddenly Bhishma blows his conch—the challenge to battle—and is answered by a blast from that of Arjuna, whose chariot driver in the fight was Krishna. A flight of arrows is sped from either side, and the famous battle opens. So soon as the fight commenced, Arjuna requested Krishna to drive his chariot into the space between the two armies, and surveying them both, he was overpowered with sadness at the thought of such valiant men being intent on taking the lives of each other of the same blood; and wished his cousins would fall upon him and kill him at the onset. This outburst of grief was the prelude to the celebrated Bhagavatgita, the divine discourse in which Krishna instructs Arjuna respecting the soul, its source and destiny, and the nature of moral obligation. The soul of man, he is given to understand, is a fragment of the universal soul into which ultimately it will be absorbed. The shadow of death hovers round mortals from their birth, and the thorn of sorrow soon pierces the heart elated with pleasure; yet all pain and pleasure are but as for a moment, nay human life is but a transient phase of being, for the spirit throws off the body as a garment. In view of these truths life or death, to slay or be slain, can be of but little moment; they cannot one jot or tittle affect the destiny of the soul. Duty alone is of paramount importance, and the duty of Arjuna, born of the warrior class, was to fight. The valour of our hero returned at the thought of duty. The battle lasted eighteen days, and the poem gives with minuteness an account of numerous single combats that were fought. Both sides fought bravely, but at the end of ten days Bhishma, the commander of the Kauravas fell mortally wounded, although he lived on for two months. Drona, his successor, was slain five days after, and Karna, who followed him at the end of two days more. Salya, who succeeded Karna, commanded only on the eighteenth day, which brought victory to the Pandavas.

Kurukshetra is on the right bank of the Jumna about fifty-four miles north of Delhi. Edwin Arnold visited it two or three years ago and wrote a most interesting account of the district, for the

press. The country he said was busy about cotton sales, and quite oblivious of its own fame. At Paniput, the nearest town to Kurukshetra, he failed to meet two Brahmins of the place who would most likely have served as his guides, but in their absence—alas! such is fame—he found not a soul who knew anything of the Kurus or their battle-field. As Byron sang of other heroes:—

“Not a stone on their turf, nor a bone in their graves,  
But they live in the verse that immortally saves.

The poet pathetically portrays the scenes immediately after the battle; the wailing of the women; burning of the bodies of the slain, and presentation of water to their manes. Yudhishtira was appointed junior king under his uncle, as Duryodhana, the former regent was killed by Bhima in the battle. But the heart of the reinstated king was heavy on account of the great slaughter in the fight, and he sought counsel from the sage Bhishma who though dying from his wounds and with his head propped up by a pillow of arrows, instructed him at great length on the duties of kings. This wonderful discourse which in the poem is called the favorite of the wise, reconciled Yudhishtira to his kingly office. It comprises several thousand verses of the poem.

Yudhishtira, again become a powerful king, resolved to celebrate the great sacrifice called the Asvamedha, or the horse sacrifice. This, when performed by a king, was a ceremony of great political as well as religious importance, and one which none but the most powerful ruler could hope to celebrate. The horse selected for the offering was set free to go at will where it pleased, but was followed by the most famous of the king's warriors. If the proclaimed authority of the institutor of the sacrifice were disputed, any king who disputed it, to make his contestation valid, must seize the horse. If this were done there was postponement of the sacrifice and humiliation of the king who intended to celebrate it. If, on the other hand the warriors unconquered, returned with the horse, it was sacrificed with imposing ceremony, and the authority of the king, in whose favor the feast was conducted, was established. The poet sings at length the praises of Arjuna, who valiantly saved from the attack of rival kings, the horse chosen for the Asvamedha instituted by Yudhishtira.

But the old king, Dhritarashtra, growing weary of his crown renounced it, and retired to the forest, to finish his days as an

anchorite. His wife, and Pritha, the mother of the Pandus, and also their uncle Vidura, followed the king's example, and withdrew into the solitudes of the forest with him. Their retreat was, however, of but short duration, for the Pandivas soon received painful tidings that their uncle was dead, and their mother with the aged king and queen had perished from a fire which swept through the forest they had chosen for their retreat. These losses caused great grief at Yudhishthira's court: and as "he who has most of heart knows most of sorrow" they weighed heaviest on the king. The cup of happiness fallen to him, charged to the brim though it was with bliss as sweet as earth could give, had failed to satisfy, and was becoming bitter to the taste. The friends of his youth were falling away, and exciting struggles against injustice were no longer a necessity: all things earthly ceased to charm: so, abdicating his throne to successors of his choice, he with his four brothers, and Draupadi, followed by a faithful dog, started for Mount Meru in the Himalayas, in quest of Indra's heaven. The court and citizens followed them outside the city, but knowing his great sorrow none could bid him stay. First in that sad retinue went Yudhishthira himself, then Bhima, and then Arjuna, after them the twin brothers, then Draupadi "with soft dark face, and eyes like lotus-petals," and following after them the dog. Wearily they wandered on till they reached the sea, where at the command of the divinity from whom Arjuna had received *Gandiva*, his best of bows, he threw it back to the waves whence it had come. Journeying on for many days they came in view of Mount Himavat, and entering on a sea of sand, saw rocky Meru, the king of mountains. Gradually the strength of these royal pilgrims failed, and one after another they fell exhausted short of the goal for which they started. First poor Draupadi sank by the way, then the twins, then Arjuna, then Bhima, till finally the king had no companion but the dog. Then with a rushing sound came the car of Indra, but the king declined to enter without his fallen companions, and was assured he would find them already in heaven. Then the dog was refused admittance, but the king did not yield to any reasoning against the dog, and would not be parted from him, feeling in his heart that not not the cumulative guilt of the four most deadly sins, would equal the sin of abandoning the meanest comrade. Then it was made known to him that this was only a test of the genuineness of his sympathy, as *Dharma*, the god of justice, himself had taken



the shape of a dog to see how steady his attachment would prove. Then he found his cousins were in heaven, but his brothers and Draupadi were expiating their sins in one of the dreadful *Narakas* or hells. He at once decided to join his brothers and share their misery, when it was made known to him that what he had seen was but *Maya*, illusion, a final test of his fidelity. Then plunging in the sacred Ganges, he left behind the frailties of the flesh, and entered into a purified relationship to the heroes of the Bharata race, and was admitted to companionship with the blessed in *Svarga*.

This meagre statement of the main story of the Mahabharata can give but the slightest conception of its merits as a poem. The dry bones of an incomplete skeleton could as well convey a correct idea of the beauty and action of the living animal. But the rudest outlines of the characters and incidents of the poem suffice to show that it has the essentials of a great epic: it sings at length great deeds of popular interest and national importance. Another feature which it possesses should commend the poem to English-speaking people. Its numerous characters reflect every phase of Hindu life, and its religious and philosophical parts, make it a most valuable exponent of the "faith and morals" still held by one hundred and eighty millions of Hindus who form part of the British Empire.



